

## **A Story of Passion, Faith, and Opportunity – Ms. Laumanu Ma’afu**

For Ms. Laumanu Ma’afu, learning has always been at the heart of her journey. Inspired by her parents, who valued education and community involvement despite not having formal employment, she grew up understanding that teaching and guiding others is a powerful form of service. Their example shaped her passion for learning and leadership, eventually leading her to become Principal of St Joseph Business College within Tonga’s Catholic school system.

Her path into education was not simply about a career “it was about purpose”. Laumanu describes her journey as one of continuous formation and transformation, shaped by family upbringing, community engagement, faith, and academic pursuit.

Today, she is widely respected for her strong advocacy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). She believes TVET plays a vital role in Tonga by giving young people practical opportunities to develop real-world skills such as carpentry, office administration, and technical trades. These skills are increasingly important as industries grow and demand hands-on expertise.

TVET also opens doors for many students who may not follow traditional academic pathways, providing accessible, flexible, and affordable learning opportunities.

Like many women in leadership, Laumanu has faced challenges along the way. She has encountered age and gender discrimination, experiences that could discourage many. Instead, she chose to treat these challenges as opportunities for professional growth. Her approach is simple but powerful: focus on the work during the day, and dedicate time beyond working hours to personal growth and strengthening relationships with family and community.

She also recognizes a broader challenge within education systems—the gap that can exist between policy and real-world implementation. Her leadership continues to advocate for



stronger collaboration between stakeholders to ensure that education initiatives are practical, coordinated, and sustainable.

When speaking to young people, Laumanu is passionate about helping them see the value of vocational pathways. With Tonga's growing industries—such as automotive services, technical trades, and skilled labour—TVET education offers meaningful employment opportunities both locally and overseas.

Her message to young people is clear:

*"TVET gives those who don't take the academic route a second chance to learn real, hands-on skills that matter in everyday life and help them build a future."*

Looking ahead, she hopes to see stronger partnerships among TVET providers, educators, and policymakers to ensure programs remain relevant and impactful for Tonga's future workforce.

This International Women's Day, we celebrate Mrs. Laumanu Ma'afu—a leader who continues to champion opportunity, dignity in skilled work, and pathways for young people to build meaningful futures.

#IWD2026 #WomenInEducation #TVET #WomenLeadership #TongaWomen #GiveToGain